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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

THE FORM OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTELLIGIBILITY¹

UNDER this title I wish to call attention to an aspect of a very old and familiar problem—that of the nature of philosophy. We habitually assign to philosophy the task of “explaining” the world, or of rendering experience “intelligible.” Now is it possible to specify more exactly what is involved in this requirement? What is it to explain or to render intelligible in the philosophical sense, and what is the form or logic in which philosophy can be required to attain rationality? It would seem necessary to understand as clearly and definitely as possible what type of explanation philosophy may properly be expected to furnish before any discussion is in order regarding its competency to fulfill its task, or concerning the relative value and pertinency of various systems.

The central position that the problem occupies logically is not, however, its only claim to consideration. The failure to discriminate between different forms of explanation has frequently given rise to practical misunderstandings regarding the fruitfulness and value of philosophical study itself. It would be hard to find a better illustration of the fact that discontent and disillusionment often have their sources in unreasonable expectations and impossible demands. Complaints are brought against philosophy—not merely by outsiders, but by its professed students as well—for a strange variety of reasons: because it does not give us demonstrations like mathematics, or new facts like the natural sciences, or esthetic enjoyment like poetry, or a technique for transforming education and social life in accordance with the demands of the age. Or, again, the demand is that philosophy shall furnish a statement of the most general relations of existence, analogous to but more inclusive than the fundamental principles of mathematics. Now I do not say that all these requirements are artificial and suggested merely by external analogies—though I think that some of them undoubtedly are—nor is it necessary to assume that on examination they would appear mutually inconsistent. They have been mentioned only to illustrate the variety of the demands that are made upon philosophy, and to

¹ Read before the Eastern Branch of American Philosophical Association at Vassar College, December 29, 1921.

suggest the corresponding necessity from a practical point of view of such an inquiry as is suggested by the title of this paper.

In considering this question it is helpful, I think, to make an attempt to distinguish genuine philosophical problems from those that are artificial. Of course such a distinction can not be made in any external fashion by setting up a preliminary definition. In philosophy, more than in any other type of inquiry, the formulation of the problem and its answer can never be sharply separated. To succeed in asking a reasonable question is already in some measure to see one's way to an answer. One must begin, then, by attempting to appreciate rightly the objective situation and its demands. A genuine philosophical problem is one that is objectively grounded and does not spring merely from the associatively directed fancy of a subjective interest. There must underlie it an order of experience that is already fundamentally organized in accordance with rational principles, and it is from the demands of this experience that philosophy as a consciously directed activity must proceed. It will of course be necessary to bring up for further examination and criticism principles previously received; but in doing this philosophy must rest its case upon an order of experience that is taken, at least provisionally, as reasonable and secure. Thus, while one may reasonably question the validity of any particular fact or phase of experience, one can not intelligibly question the validity of experience as a whole. The beginning of all philosophy consists in an acceptance of the world-order of our own time and civilization, and from these roots all its genuine problems spring.

These considerations when applied help to protect us against a good many pseudo-problems that are popularly supposed to be the special interest of philosophy. It is not the business of philosophy, as Lotze was fond of remarking, to prove that the world exists or to demonstrate how it is made. Philosophy has not to show us how to make a world, but to help us in understanding the actual world in which we find ourselves. The genuine problems of philosophy are natural problems, not reached by any artificial straining, but generated by the demands of a human life to know itself and to become at home in its world.

There is always a special danger that when philosophy is carried on largely by schools and schoolmen it may become artificial through too great an emphasis upon formal completeness and the requirements of technical demonstration. It would be quite in order to raise the question, "Are we Scholastics?" Scholasticism has of course its merits, and I am not arguing in favor of dilettantism, or lack of earnestness and seriousness in carrying on philosophical inquiries, but against making what is merely technical and abstract

the end and goal. It is of course to be admitted that for certain preliminary inquiries in philosophy technical methods and a rigorously defined terminology are necessary. But two things should be borne in mind: first, that such technical inquiries are a part of philosophy only in so far as they directly or indirectly throw light upon some genuine problem, and, secondly, that the philosopher by profession is not thereby set apart from his fellows and dedicated to some precious but obscure inquiry in which they have neither part nor lot. The important matter is to rid thought of abstractions that are not instrumental to concrete knowledge, and as little to accept our problems ready-made from the schoolmen of the present day as from those of the past. Philosophy, as criticism that is based upon life, has first of all the function of showing the irrationality and illegitimacy of many questions, both contemporary and traditional.

But the mere resolve to occupy one's thought with the concrete is not enough: it is also necessary to proceed to it through criticism, *i.e.*, though a natural dialectic of thought. That way is long and difficult, and is in general the path which the classical systems of philosophy have tried to follow.

On the other hand, I can not help thinking that in some of the present-day movements that advertise themselves as "new" and "scientific" there is plainly marked a tendency to turn away from one form of abstraction in order to take refuge in another. The desire to direct philosophy into more fruitful channels doubtless underlies the effort to assimilate its procedure to that of the special sciences. The traditional form of philosophical inquiry, it is said, is neither logically convincing nor practically fruitful, while contemporary science offers an example of an increase and systematization of positive facts that represent a solid achievement both on account of its certainty and of its service to society. Hence arises the demand that philosophy shall be reformed by the adoption of the scientific method, and made to yield conclusions that are rigidly demonstrable and capable of fruitful application.

Now one may sympathize in large measure with the motives of these reformers without being ready to accept their somewhat pessimistic diagnosis of the condition of philosophy or approving the remedies they propose to employ. That philosophical inquiry should be carried on with systematic thoroughness and with the utmost attention to real facts and willingness to follow where the argument leads, no one would wish to deny. Indeed, only on these terms is philosophy true to its name. But this is not to assert that it must abandon its own problems and procedure and seek for a place among the sciences. Here again I would suggest the possi-

bility that dissatisfaction with historical philosophy has its source in a misunderstanding in regard to the form of intelligibility at which its representatives have aimed. May it not be true that the historical systems seem to certain persons to have little value just because they themselves are interested only in a different type of problem, and that this fact explains why they seem to themselves to have received a stone when they asked for bread?

Apart from religion, there are three consciously directed approaches through which the mind may be said to attempt to render the world familiar to itself—those of science, of philosophy, and of art. In ordinary life these interests are not clearly defined and differentiated, and in every normal individual they are all present and influence each other in some degree. But however intimate their relation in the life of any individual, it is essential that one form of problem should not be confused with another. The form of intelligibility that philosophy seeks, and in some measure attains, is not that of science and not that of art, nor is it any admixture of the two, though it has relations with both. Leaving for the present the nature of art out of account, we may consider some of the fundamental distinctions between scientific and philosophical explanation.

One or two preliminary remarks are, however, necessary to avoid misunderstanding. In the first place, the distinction between these two modes of inquiry does not exclude, but rather provides for, mutual aid and supplementation in practise. The effort to explain the world is a human undertaking and is carried on by human beings, not by the abstractions we sometimes name “the philosopher” and “the scientist.” To ensure genuine progress in any field it is necessary that the two forms of inquiry should take note of each other, even that they should interpenetrate each other within the same mind. I have tried at various times to state and illustrate my understanding of necessary connection between them, and of the nature of the dialectic by means of which they are connected. At present I wish to insist that it is only by keeping clear the essential differences that the true relation between them can be understood.

The general question regarding the relations of philosophy and the sciences has, then, many aspects which must at present be left out of account. What I wish to emphasize is that the demands of explanation in the two fields are not identical, and that a complete explanation in one set of terms has no immediate relevancy as an answer to a question raised from the point of view of the other inquiry. The scientific explanation of why Socrates is sitting in prison awaiting the execution of his sentence, stated in terms of the contraction of the muscles of his legs and the revolutions of his bones in the socket joints does not furnish the kind of explanation

that is demanded. What is required is to supply the context in terms of the personality and moral character of Socrates. It is not a mere difference of substituting a teleological for a mechanical explanation, as might appear from the illustration. That the form of philosophical intelligibility always does involve teleology, is, I think, true. Nevertheless it is necessary to carry the matter further since there is a superficial type of teleological explanation that has no claim to the title of philosophy, just as there are causal explanations that can not properly be regarded as scientific.

It may throw additional light upon the question before us to ask what legitimate demand of our intelligence remains unsatisfied after the scientific account is complete. What is still lacking to comprehension? It may be said that the sciences make us familiar with the general framework of reality and furnish a kind of inventory of the different types of things contained therein by exhibiting how they may be thought of as compounded in certain uniform ways of simpler events or elements. The laws expressing the relationships of these elements are at the same time, as Bacon points out, rules by means of which they may be constructed. Now although this type of explanation is indispensable, and may even seem to satisfy all justifiable demands in regard to certain fields of reality, it does not give us any insight regarding the nature of the significant individual things by which we are surrounded and in relation to which we live. On the contrary, it obliterates all real individuality and reduces everything to identical elements or events. It yields knowledge in the form of general concepts that do not directly apply to concrete individual wholes, but to the abstractly simplified relations of ideally defined units.

Now conceivably in the realm of what we call nature it might be possible by substituting poetry and other forms of art to dispense entirely with the philosophical mode of inquiry. I have a friend who sometimes remarks, "I never feel any need of philosophy. When I turn from mathematics I fall back on poetry." That attitude seems comprehensible, as I have said, so far as the realm of outer nature is concerned, though even there I believe it would not be difficult to show that experience involves a relation to actual individual wholes whose nature demands comprehension in intellectual and not merely in imaginative terms. However that may be, it is certainly true that human nature and the world of social and historical life have always formed the central interest of philosophy, and of these the attitude in question simply renounces all critical and coherent knowledge. For the sciences based on the logic of mathematical calculation recognize no individuals and can furnish no insight

into the reciprocal human relations that constitute the social and historical life of man.

What we seek under the name of philosophy is an understanding based on reflective criticism and observation, of the individuals and types of individuals that make up the world we live in. This process of reflection, it is evident, must both presuppose and issue in a knowledge of the self. I know of no better description of philosophy than as the most fully integrated effort of man to establish relations with his world and thus to attain to the familiarity and confidence that come from understanding.

Where shall we look for a realized exemplar of that kind of intelligibility? Philosophy, as Hegel loved to say, can not be real as mere desire for knowledge, but only through recognizing itself as knowledge already implicitly realized. If science does not give us the form of knowledge we seek, where is it actually to be found? In the classical systems of philosophy, doubtless. But it seems to me that a familiar illustration of the kind of insight that constitutes philosophy may be drawn from the understanding that we have of that part of the world with which we are most familiar, such as the circle of the home, or the life of a small community whose members have known each other long and intimately. In such situations the spirit of the whole is comprehended as the common life of which all the individuals partake, and in terms of which their relations to each other seem natural and reasonable. This kind of understanding is of the essence of logic, though it is rarely drawn out into a system of abstract propositions. But at its best it holds within it, as it were in solution, the result of countless observations and analyses, and is thus supported by all kinds of lore—historical, scientific, psychological—constituting a richness of concrete detail that has been harmonized and blended into the form of immediate familiarity. The depth and significance of the immediacy are proportional to the attention and insight that have gone into processes that have led up to it. Such understanding does not come by nature, or through mere unreflective contact, but is the product of accurate observations and of well-disciplined and sympathetic imagination. It is no blind oracle pronouncing ambiguous conclusions, but has its witness within it and is able to supply the context that renders its judgments intelligible. It may accordingly be said that this type of knowledge is philosophical in the degree in which it attains systematic completeness of view in concrete form. It comprehends individuals of different orders in the form of a significant and concrete unity by supplying the context that gives to them the form of a self-subsisting whole.

Objection may, however, be raised against accepting this familiar

type of knowledge as an illustration of the true form of philosophical intelligibility on the ground that the latter must rest upon rigorously demonstrated propositions that command universal consent. Universality and necessity, we have been often told, is the true form of philosophy. There is a truth in that statement, but the philosophical form of universality and necessity is not that which belongs to abstract propositions. Science is a system of abstract propositions, but the demand for this type of demonstration in philosophy rests upon a confusion of ideas. Rigorous logical proof of the type demanded by science is always purchased at the cost of abstraction, as is most clearly illustrated in the case of mathematics; the more complete the abstraction from reality the more compelling is the nature of the formal demonstration. Just because philosophy is occupied with the relations of concrete individuals and systems of individuals, the logic of general propositions can not be its final test or form of truth.

The difficulty is still likely to be urged, however, that what is not expressible in propositions that can be formally demonstrated is but subjective opinion, and can never furnish a common basis for life or society. This would be a serious objection if it were true. But it rests, I think, upon a misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge as a process of systematic concretion, a movement from the abstract to the concrete. In the first place, demonstration of the type described by formal logic has its place and function only within this total process. It always presupposes an objective world of fact upon which the common intelligence of individuals rests. The abstract method can operate only in so far as it is supported by a concrete basis of organized fact. One could infer nothing in a world of mere assumptions. And secondly, in actual reasoning there is always the further question after the formal correctness of a conclusion has been accepted—the question, namely, as to what application it has, *i.e.*, how it enters concretely into the world of reality and modifies or further defines our knowledge of the nature of the individual systems that compose it.

The common experience which forms the basis of a common social life is, even on its intellectual side, wrongly conceived as of the inflexible type suggested by the literal identity of identically formulated propositions. It is comparatively easy to agree upon a common formula; but no matter how carefully the words have been defined in the abstract, the attempt to apply the formula is sure to reveal differences of personal opinion. Such formulas have an important function as instruments in attaining a common understanding, and they serve too as a nucleus about which common feelings grow up. But neither practical life nor philosophy can rest

in such abstract forms of agreement. The conditions of a common life demand differences no less than identity. Without such differences there would be no knowledge, nothing but the dead level of opinion that is without life or movement. If this is true, the objectivity of philosophy is not something guaranteeing a common platform of truth that is once for all defined and demonstrated. It is rather the concrete basis of an understanding developed through the give and take of a common life.

If the logic of philosophy is of the character that I have endeavored to sketch, it is evident that the oft-repeated criticism that it obscures differences and issues in a block universe is based upon a failure to distinguish clearly between its goal and that of the sciences. It is the logic of science that has an eye only for uniformities, while that of philosophy seeks out and maintains differences. The latter, however, does not rest in discrete or isolated points of view; for the principle of individuality when rightly understood leads on to a system of individualities. The individual, that is, just because it is not a mere particular but possesses character or significance, is a member of a world or system of individuals. Everything however depends upon rightly apprehending the nature of the universal that at once unifies and individualizes its members. That is, neither aspect of the individual reality must be taken apart from the other. If we say that the individual is the synthesis of the particular and the universal, we must remember that these aspects have no meaning apart from each other, they are not elements existing separately out of which we have to compound the individual whole. The universal is not something to be pictured existentially, either as a connecting link, or a common element in different individuals. Philosophy is indeed speculation or seeing, but its light must not be confused with representation in the form of imagery. As reason, *i.e.*, the integral mind in its totality and completest effort after the real thing, it has the form of universality and freedom. That is, it is not bound down and controlled, as in the ordinary routine of practical life, by the first form of particularity and hard isolation, but sees beyond these and comprehends their true reality and significance in terms of its own system of concrete truth.

The conclusion we have reached, then, is that the philosophical form of intelligibility is that of a concrete universal which expresses the inwardness and essence of individuals through the grasp of their constitutive relations. Just because modern science is not concerned with significant individuals, but with abstract aspects taken as bare "existences," its universal is barely conceptual or nominal. A scientific law is regarded as simply a generalized formula or abbreviated record of correlations between certain abstract aspects of real

things. The whole purpose of the inquiry is to obtain a summary form of representing facts so as to afford a convenient and economic means of dealing with them practically. "The existential point of view" is neither that of common-sense nor that of philosophy: it is an artificial simplification which has its own logic and its own justification, adopted and maintained by scientific procedure in accordance with carefully defined assumptions. It may fairly be characterized as an external form of representation, indispensable for its own purposes but as contributing nothing directly to philosophical understanding. Like Descartes's material bodies, scientific phenomena may be said to have no insides. In dealing with them the mind moves, that is, on the plane of external existence and represents or pictures the relations between them in terms of a logic derived from space. The statement said to have been made by the late Lord Kelvin that he could understand a theory only when he was able to represent it in a drawing, illustrates well the point I have in mind. This seems to be the form of intelligibility toward which all the sciences look as their ideal.

But philosophy in its own domain has no concern with the bare form of existence. To achieve the form of intelligibility at which it aims it is indeed necessary that the mind shall understand the truth that is contained in this abstract standpoint, but it has also to free itself from the domination of existential imagery in order to rise to freedom and universality. It is, however, important to note that freedom from imagery is not identical with withdrawal from what is actual and concrete. The real world is the world of significant individual wholes constituted by reflective experience; not that of the superficial and conflicting impressions of practical life.

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MEASURES OF INTELLIGENCE AND CHARACTER

ONE of the most important questions that arise in connection with the widespread use of the intelligence examination is: What part does intelligence, as measured by such a test as the Army Alpha, play in success in an occupation? The report of the psychological examining in the U. S. Army provides valuable material pertaining to this question. The median intelligence for various occupations is given, together with the range of the middle fifty per cent. (*Mem. Nat. Acad. of Sci.*, 1921, XV, pp. 819 ff.). The range of intelligence within a given occupation is great and the overlapping among the occupations is also great, so that for pur-